



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



France



Germany

Tampere Stadium, Tampere

Thursday 27 August 2009 - 16.30CET (17.30 local time)

Group B - Matchday 2

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Committed to the future of European football

Neid ready to break the mould

As her side prepare to take on France in their second Group B outing of UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™, Germany coach Silvia Neid has revealed she will consider remixing her winning formula.

Dangerous opponent

A comprehensive 4-0 victory in their opening match against Norway got the holders' defence off to a perfect start, while France also beat Iceland 3-1, meaning whoever wins this match will guarantee a quarter-final berth, and quite probably first place. However, as Neid is aware, "technically strong" France are entirely different opposition – Les Bleues are among the very few nations who can boast two victories from their last three meetings with Germany. Furthermore, Neid believes France could be every bit as awkward to overcome this time around, admitting: "Actually, we probably prefer playing against more robust teams where we can use our physical strength."

Attractive options

With such a specification in mind, Neid must decide whether to stick with the starting XI that dealt with 2005 finalists Norway so competently. Her triple substitution against Bjarne Berntsen's team – drafting in Célia Okoyino da Mbabi, Fatmire Bajramaj and Anja Mittag – proved inspired and any of those three could be given the nod on Matchday 2. Another attractive option comes in the form of Simone Laudehr, the defensive midfielder having overcome a knee ligament problem to challenge youngster Kim Kulig for a start. "The question is whether to change a successful team or not," Neid said.

'Freshness' key

"It's not only that, you always have to bear in mind that players need to recover," she added. "The game against Norway was very demanding. Simone is fit again and she could be an option, while the substitutes who came on showed me what great balance we have in the squad. We will have to work very hard against France and that freshness could be important."

Major setbacks

France suffered two setbacks in quick succession in their 3-1 opening-night victory over Iceland, with key players Corine Franco and Candie Herbert leaving the field within three minutes of each other due to head injuries received in separate collisions. Should the duo be ruled out, France coach Bruno Bini has absolute faith in his reinforcements.

Squad game

"We have two players injured, but we have 20 more who are fit so I can't complain too much," he said. "If I have to make changes I'm not concerned. When my entire squad is free from injuries, I have 22 starters – everyone can play. In every match, I have to leave eleven starters on the bench so, this time, it won't be so bad. My only big concern was for Candie's parents, in particular, when they saw those images of her [after suffering a deep cut above her brow] on TV."

Viguiier relaxed as Germany loom large

Despite being under no illusions as to the challenge that awaits them, France are looking ahead to their next test against Germany with an air of tranquillity following their morale-boosting victory against Iceland in their Group B opener.

Hidden goal

There are no signs that the scale of their upcoming task is hampering the relaxed mood within Bruno Bini's camp, as Sabrina Viguiier – a substitute in Monday's 3-1 victory – illustrated. France coach Bini has opted not to reveal the team's ambitions for UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™, saying only that his players are happy to be in Finland, and Montpellier HSC defender Viguiier was happy to pursue the party line. "We focus mainly on ourselves," she said. "That's our top priority; then we can see what happens with our opponents."

No 'heroic act'

Les Bleues claim to be satisfied just to have qualified for Finland after missing out on the FIFA Women's World Cup two years ago. The eventual winners of that particular tournament were, of course, Germany, who retained the global crown to add to their four straight European titles. Viguiier is nonetheless adamant that France do not fear Silvia Neid's all-conquering charges, with victory enough to book a quarter-final berth. "It will be a tough game, but I don't think it would be a heroic act [to defeat Germany], let's just say that," the 28-year-old Physical Education teacher explained. "The game starts at 0-0, with eleven players on each side. We have two legs and two arms, just like the Germans do, so I don't think you can call it a heroic deed for us to win against them."

'Same philosophy'

Viguiier, who is set to win her 75th cap at Tampere Stadium on Thursday evening, also recalls France's 1-0 defeat of Germany in the Algarve Cup in 2007, earned with a group of players almost identical to the one Bini has at his disposal here in Finland: "I remember that victory well and I know we have the same motivation to succeed this time – the same philosophy." Germany have been warned.

Fate finally smiles on Da Mbabi

Célia Okoyino da Mbabi, one of the best upcoming talents in German women's football, has certainly not had it easy. However, UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ may well provide the perfect setting for the explosive forward's career to finally take off.

Double setback

After claiming a winner's medal at the 2004 FIFA U-19 Women's World Cup, she was forced to sit out the senior European finals the following year with a skiing injury. Da Mbabi came back strongly and was again knocking on the national-team door until the SC 07 Bad Neuenahr player fractured a tibia in a Frauen-Bundesliga game at FC Bayern München in March 2007 and was sidelined for well over a year.

Brave battle

Her resilience shone through again as she overcame the second major injury of her career to be part of her country's bronze-medal winning side at the 2008 Olympics. But just as she seemed ready to consign her previous setbacks to history, a bout of glandular fever kept her out during the early part of this year.

Enduring 'passion'

Despite spending uncounted hours in rehabilitation, however, Da Mbabi never abandoned her dream of reaching the highest level. "I would be hanging around in treatment rooms from eight in the morning until eight in the evening, some of the patients even asked me for help as they thought I was an employee!" she said. "But I have a passion for football."

Sudden impact

Now, back in the fold for both club and country, a fully-fit Da Mbabi gave a glimpse of her burgeoning talents as a 65th-minute substitute in Germany's 4-0 win against Norway on Monday. Her direct, dynamic style stretched Norway's defence to breaking point at times. And, looking ahead to Germany's second Group B fixture against France, Da Mbabi is hoping coach Silvia Neid unleashes her again – in a match of extra-special significance.

French connection

"My mother is from France and I had a French passport when I was younger," explained Da Mbabi, who received German citizenship in 2004. "But France's football federation just didn't know about me, I guess, until I showed up at some youth tournaments. As I was born in Germany, it was a natural choice for me." And Da Mbabi knows she can count on some support from France even as she goes head-to-head with Les Bleues.

Striking ambition

"My grandmother, aunt, uncle and cousins all live in France, but I'm sure they will all be sitting in front of the television screen to support me," she said. "I am in contact with some of the France players regularly, but I am completely focused on this game and I would love to score, even if it's against France."